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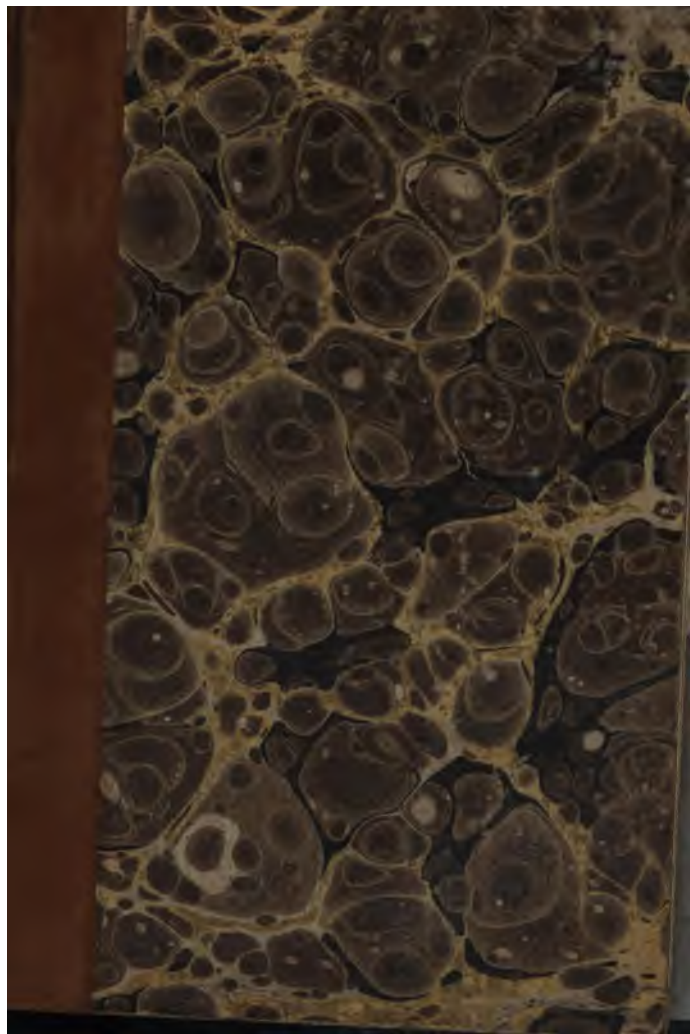
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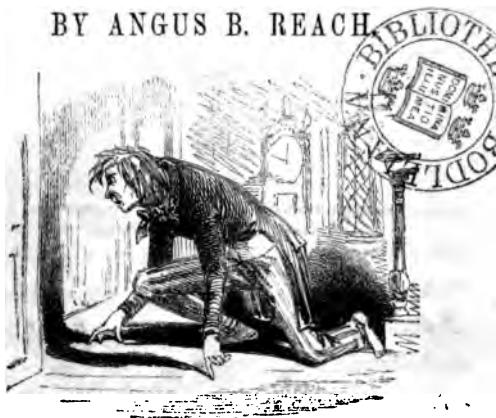


**Just as the young gentleman was in the act of opening a pretty capacious jaws for the first bite, the pie was rudely snatched out of his hands.**

# A ROMANCE OF A MINCE-PIE;

AN INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF JOHN CHIRRUP,  
OF FORTY-WINKS, PASTRY-COOK AND CONFECTIONER.

BY ANGUS B. REACH.



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY PHIZ.

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# A ROMANCE OF A MINCE-PIE.

## CHAPTER I.



N a quiet, quaint,  
I may almost say,  
undiscovered nook  
of Merry England,  
lies a humble little  
borough, not men-  
tioned in any sche-  
dule of the Reform  
Bill. To get to it,

you must leave all main dusty roads—the pro-  
*jected* railway there was never made, and the

chairman of the enterprising company now lives in the Capecure at Boulogne-sur-Mer—and betake yourself to wandering cross ways of very uncertain length, which lead through quiet fields, and fat loamy meadows, and by primitive farm houses, until you see, peering above the trees, a grey battered-looking steeple, very much the worse for wear, surmounted by a weather-cock, which, in consequence either of rust or a remarkable prevalence of westerly winds, has looked steadily towards the setting sun for a quarter of a century. The steeple and the weather-cock are the steeple and weather-cock of the town of Forty-winks.

Proceeding onwards, you mark a scattered cottage or two, then a row of almshouses, then a pump. After this you turn the corner by the stocks—the May-pole is just opposite—into the High Street. You are now in Forty-winks. To the right you will behold the Lamb Inn and Hotel: observe the scattered market carts which stand before it. That building on the left, raised upon smouldering stone *pillars, is the Town Hall.* The market is held

beneath it every Tuesday; and the Corporation, which consists of a mayor, a mace, two aldermen, and a beadle, meet in the damp white-washed room above, as often as may be necessary, for the discussion of the financial or general policy of Forty-winks.

As I said, it is a quiet, easy-going place. People look from windows at a foot passenger, as they would do at a chaise and pair in more lively towns. Sometimes you might drop a pin from a second floor, and hear its tiny tinkle upon the pavement. The grocer and the draper and the baker dose half the day in their shops, or chat listlessly each from his respective door. Children principally abound in the tortuous passages which branch from the High Street, leading amongst irregular rows of cottages to the outskirts of Forty-winks, where green patches of cheerful garden-ground begin to penetrate and intersect the straggling limbs of the little town, and then gradually to introduce them to the open fields.

At No. 10 High Street—there are no numbers.

but I am counting from the Cross, northwards—  
there is a shop, over which is placed this sign,  
**JOHN CHIRRUP, PASTRY-COOK AND CONFECTIONER.**



Mr. Chirrup was, and I believe is still, a little fat man, of easy and festive disposition, inclined to *a good dinner*, and to a snug nap after it. He is

very popular in Forty-winks, not only by reason of his pastry, which is positively the staple of the place, but on account of his merry good-heartedness. Indeed, the fat sweetness of his condiments appear to have entered into the man's nature. He has been heard to say that if he had his will, the world should be one great plum-cake, and all the men and women kings and queens, in rich robes of dainty sugar. Every evening Mr. Chirrup takes his place near the fire in the public room at the Lamb. The bell-pull hangs at his elbow, and when any of the company require a replenished pipe or glass, they say—the phrase is stereotyped in Forty-winks—“Mr. Chirrup, would you oblige?” on which Mr. Chirrup always responds, “‘Too happy;” and jerks the bell with a radiant countenance.

I have said that Chirrup lives at No. 10 High Street. He is a bachelor, but a niece, Pattie Chirrup, at the opening of our story a pretty, thoughtless, little human doll of sixteen or thereby, cheers his solitude. No. 10 is, as may be conceived by ingenious minds, next to No. 11. Both houses



FATTIE CHIRRUP.

in fact appear one, separated from Nos. 9 and 12 by a lane on one hand, and a bit of waste ground—where they are going to erect either a *Mechanics' Institute* or a Gas Works—on the other.

Behind Nos. 10 and 11 there are narrow strips of garden.

The name engraved upon the dirty brass door-plate of No. 11, Chirrup's neighbour's house, is Snitch. The gentleman answering to this appellation is also a bachelor; but lives perfectly alone, doing his own cooking, and, as has been suspected from the cut of his ungainly, ill put on clothes, his own tailoring also. Snitch is a snarling, sulky, ill-tempered man. Had he been a poet or a gentleman, he would have been a misanthrope, a recluse, a lofty-minded being, turning with disdain from the vulgar attributes of the vulgar herd. But as he could neither write—or at all events did not try—a Childe Harold, a Manfred, or a Giaour—people contented themselves with thinking him simply an ill-conditioned, peevish, unamiable, man, possibly troubled with the bile.

Snitch had no acquaintances in Forty-winks, but he always attended funerals, and generally wore a dress of rusty black. He was the terror of all the children in the place. He would throw



habit of nocturnal yelping, out of spite to humanity in general. At all events, Angel commenced business every evening at bed-time. His kennel was in the back garden ; and just as the lights were disappearing from bed-room windows, he poked his head out of his wooden habitation, and howled, whined, barked, and yelped by turns, sometimes until dawn, sometimes until breakfast time.

The whole population of course suffered from Angel, but Chirrup, owing to his proximity, was the greatest martyr. I have said that Chirrup loved good eating and good sleeping, like a sensible man as he was. Angel interfered little with the one, but he completely spoiled the other. Half-a-dozen times did the justly indignant pastry-cook complain to Snitch, who merely grinned and rubbed his hands in his pockets.

“ I don’t keep you from yelping at the Lamb,” said Snitch ; “ why should you keep my dog from yelping in my garden ? ”

Chirrup threatened to indict master and dog *nuisances* ; but somehow the Forty-winkians we

not a litigious people, and Chirrup was naturally indolent, so the threat remained a threat, and nothing else. Angel yelped and yelped : Chirrup got up half-a-dozen times in the night—his bedroom window overlooked the garden—and by turns roared and stormed at the implacable disturber of his rest. Once or twice the confectioner tried the effects of bribery and corruption, flinging a piece or two of mouldy pastry to the cur. Angel greedily devoured the mess, and then barked for more ; so it became evident to Chirrup that if he were to silence the dog by keeping him eating, he must devote every pie, pudding, tart, lollipop, and confection in his shop to the purpose. So he gave over the attempt, and Angel persevered in his malpractices. Every night at the Lamb, Chirrup rehearsed his griefs. He was getting quite pale from want of sleep. Occasionally, under the influence of an extra pipe or an extra glass, he would threaten to kick Snitch and throttle his dog next day ; but when the morning came, he never took any overt step in the matter, and at night Angel barked and

Chirrup tossed restlessly between the blankets as before.

So stood matters when Christmas was approaching. Now, Chirrup was famed for his mince-pies. Christmas would not, in Forty-winks, have been Christmas without Chirrup's mince-pies. They were looked upon as parts of the solemnities of the season, and the demand was universal.

One night, after the pastry-cook had gone through a hard day's work in the preparation of his first batch of pies, he appeared in his usual place at the Lamb.

"You're not looking well, Chirrup, this evening," said Bob Tanks, the grocer, one of his cronies.

"Why, you see, Mr. Tanks," replied the confectioner, "a good ten hours' work before a hot oven, in a tolerable floury atmosphere, don't improve a man's complexion."

"And that's true," said Groats the baker. "It takes a good night's sleep after that—it does."

"A good night's sleep!" exclaimed Chirrup

"Ah! it's very easy to speak—it is; but it's little sleep I'll have this blessed night; for that —— dog ——"

"He barks yet, does he?" inquired Tanks, who lived at the other end of the town. "Well, I've sometimes thought I heer'd him, and so 'as the missus."

"Bark!" exclaimed Chirrup, "bark! I believe you. I never see such a born devil for noise."

"Why don't you give him a mince-pie or two?" demanded Tanks. "He'd eat them."

"Would'nt he!" said Chirrup. "Yes, and then growl for more."

"Not if you made them right," hinted Tanks.

"Make 'em right!" ejaculated the pastry-cook. "If I make my mince-pies right, eh?"

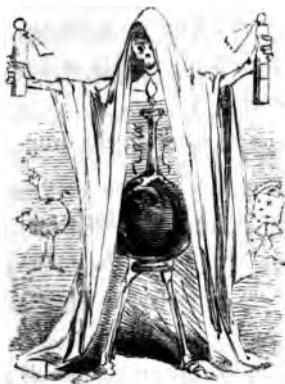
"You see," said Tanks, gravely, "there's two ways o' makin' pies: one way for Christians, as is good customers, and another way for curs, as is rum customers. There is some things—as a dog don't bark arter eating them, ——"

"Mr. Chirrup, would you oblige?" said the

baker, who having been engaged in a polemical discussion with certain of the company, had heard nothing of Tanks's advice.

"Too happy," mechanically responded Chirrup, and then, after jerking the bell, he pondered upon the grocer's words and remained in a wrapt state, similar to Macbeth's condition after meeting the witches.

## CHAPTER II.



HERE are two drug-gists' shops in Forty-winks: one of them, an "establishment" in the main street, with a splendid picture connected with the Pharmaceutical College in the window; the other, a dingy little shop, in a secondary lane, faced by the high blank wall of the garden of the Grange.

Into this shop Mr. Chirrup bent his furtive way.  
the forenoon after the conversation at the Lamb

The proprietor was making pills by the help of a fluted brass machine, which divided a roll of nasty brown paste into pellets of the requisite size. "Mr. Chirrup, sir, and is it you?" said the druggist, "You don't mean to say you want physic?"

"No, no," replied Chirrup, hastily; "never took any since I was a boy, and don't mean to begin. I—I—want—the fact is," and Chirrup could not help a little hesitation from being visible in his manner, "I want some arsenic."

"Not for the mince-pies?" observed the druggist, jokingly.

Mr. Chirrup took an involuntary step back, and then replied majestically, "No nonsense, if you please, sir. Give me what I want, and ask no questions."

This outbreak was so unlike the pastry-cook's general suavity of manner, that the druggist fixed a keen look upon him.

"Rats," stammered Chirrup, "rats."

"Ah!" said the proprietor of the shop, and *without another word* he went to a drawer, too

out a quantity of white powder, weighed it, made it up into a small packet, and handed it over to his customer, who paid the demanded price; and, bidding an awkward good-day to the vendor, left the shop.

Mr. Chirrup took a circuitous route home, and went round the corners carefully, for he had a sort of indefinable lurking apprehension of Snitch's wrath, now that he carried what he trusted would be the seasoning of Angel's last meal in his pocket. He reached his shop, however, unmolested, and entering it dismissed Pattie, who presided in his absence, to dress herself for the day. The pastry-cook then selected one of the most tempting mince-pies from the shelf, and after glancing uneasily around, retreated to the desk, which was at the end of the counter, and screened by a bit of brown cotton from vulgar gaze. Chirrup was about to poison a dog—a filthy, unbearable cur; yet so placid was his nature, so milky his blood, that he experienced about as much trepidation as many a man would feel before administering the same fatal dose to a fellow-creature.



The pastry-cook undid the little packet of white powder, and placed it beside the mince-pie upon the desk. Then opening the latter carefully with a breakfast knife, he looked first at the tempting food, and then at the deadly poison. It appeared such a fearful thing to mix the one with the other. Had it been a bit of meat or bread, he thought he should not have minded. Dogs and men eat bread and meat; but mince-pie is peculiarly a human dish, and a Christmas dish. Chirrup's hand trembled as he took a pinch of the powder and held it above the savoury fruit, tucked in between blankets of pastry. He paused long, looking vacantly out of the window between a jar of mixed confections and a box of peppermint lozenges.

"Oh! o—o—oh!" sobbed a boy's voice in the street.

Chirrup started, and presently Tommy Sawyer—he knew him well—came limping and hopping along on the opposite pavement, rubbing his while Angel appeared walking deliberately *licking his lips.*



The pastry-cook no longer hesitated. With a tolerably profuse hand he sprinkled the arsenic over the savoury contents of the mince-pie; and then hastily flinging the remainder of the drug into the fire, covered the deadly pasty with its saucer-like top, and was in the act of depositing it in a lock-up drawer, when Pattie's head was popped into the shop, and Pattie's voice exclaimed, "Uncle!"

"Well," ejaculated Chirrup, jumping up with a nervous start, the fatal mince-pie in his hand. "Who's there, eh?"



"Law!" said Pattie, "I declare you're getting quite nervous, uncle. I only wanted you to do the bottom hook of my dress; I've broken all my nails trying to do it." They are a primitive people Forty-winks.

The pastry-cook glanced irresolutely around. He evidently did not like to lock up the mince-*before his niece*; so, after a moment's hesitation

he said, "Well, then, make haste, you baggage!" and depositing the deadly pasty upon the counter, followed Pattie through the glass door which led to the parlour.



Mr. Chirrup before leaving the shop did not look into the street, otherwise he would have seen a shabby hungry-like boy flattening his nose against one of the windows, and industriously contemplating the good things in them. This young gentleman had observed the mince-pie laid upon the counter, had marked the retreat of the master of the shop, and after waiting for a second to give him



*law, sprung into the deserted warehouse, snatched up the coveted pasty, and was in the act of*

appearing over the threshold as Mr. Chirrup showed again at the glass door.

The flurried tradesman caught a momentary glimpse of an uplifted leg vanishing round his door posts. His eye instinctively fell upon the counter : the mince-pie was gone. Mr. Chirrup was not given to gymnastics, but he vaulted into the public



part of the shop, and rushed into the street. The same leg he had seen a moment before was just visible at the corner where High Street is intersected by Cross Lane; and down the lane in question went Mr. Chirrup in hot pursuit. He was always fated to be just too late. The narrow street where he had bought the poison ran at right angle to Cross Lane, and parallel with the High Street. At the corner Mr. Chirrup obtained the same momentary glimpse of the thief's limb as he had caught twice before; but when he himself arrived at the same point, not a being was visible. Chirrup's heart sunk within him. He cast a despairing glance up and down the street, and then mechanically followed in the direction in which the unhappy amateur of mince-pies had disappeared. This course led him by the shop where he had purchased the arsenic. The druggist stood at the door, and saw Chirrup run hatless and breathless by, the pastry-cook not having the heart or the time to stop to ask a single question.

*"Oh, Lord!"* soliloquised the pill-maker



here's a job! Why did I give him that arsenic?  
 e's been and poisoned some one, that's clear. I  
 ight have known what he wanted it for by his  
 anner. They'll hang him, they're safe to do that;  
 id me, they'll make me an accessory before the



fact. I'm a done man—done!" And so saying, the horrified druggist retired into his shop.

Meantime Chirrup, utterly at fault, ran distractedly up one lane and down another. His proceedings were of course not unobserved. Wondering faces appeared at the windows—hurrying forms emerged from hastily opened doors. Half-a-dozen times was the pastry-cook entreated to stop and tell who or what he was running after, but he replied not a word; and at length, utterly baffled and worn out, he walked slowly back to his shop, followed by an escort of wondering boys, whom Chirrup, suddenly turning upon the threshold, ordered away, in a tone they had never before heard used by the good-natured little confectioner. But one or two of the grown-up people of the place, who had cautiously followed in the rear, remarked how livid was Chirrup's cheek, and how wild excited was his eye.

Pattie was in the shop when he entered. "Uncle, uncle!" she exclaimed, "what *ever* *matter*? Do you know that you were in

hurry that you stuck the hook in the hem, and not in the eye?"

"Go down stairs!" said Chirrup, in a voice which blanched the cheeks of his niece, who obeyed without speaking.

Chirrup sat down again at his desk, with his hands clenched upon the ledger before him. For a moment or two there was a dead silence. His eyes wandered vacantly round the shop; they fell upon the shelf of mince-pies; and as he jerked his head in the opposite direction, his glance caught hardly less assuring object. Upon the pavement before the shop sat Angel, more hideous than ever, his little bleared eyes appearing to Mr. Chirrup to be winking upon him between the confection bottles.

The poor pastry-cook groaned audibly. "And for you," he murmured, "for you I'm a murderer. For you I'll have taken the life of a fellow-creature—a sinful one, but still a fellow-creature. Oh dear! Oh dear! I wonder if he's alive yet."

And so saying Chirrup's head fell heavily upon the desk, and he remained motionless. He was

roused by the noise of footsteps and a grating voice, and starting up with a quickened inspiration, he saw the ugly face of Snitch gazing at him, over the screen of the desk.

For a moment the two men looked at each other. Chirrup's face was as white as paper, tears were flowing down his cheeks, the facial muscles were rigid, and the eyes had a wild stare.

"So," said Snitch very slowly, "so." Chirrup's legs appeared to twitch under him, and a cold hand seemed to clasp his heart. In a moment the blood rushed through him, like a cataract, and, as he started up, his face was purple.

"What is it?" he rather screamed than said.

"Oh, ah! nothing," drawled Snitch. "Have you anything to say about my dog?"

"No, no, no," exclaimed the pastry-cook.

"That 's lucky," drawled Snitch, "I thought you had."

"What do you want? quick!" shouted the *confectioner*.

"Only one of your famous mince-pies," responded the other.

It was the first time Snitch had ever asked for such a thing, and Chirrup thought that he laid a significant emphasis upon the "famous." The poor fellow sunk backwards on his stool, and glared upon his customer, who gazed at him in turn as though he would look into his very soul. Snitch spoke at last.

"There 's something the matter with you," he said, with more apparent feeling than could have been looked for; "I 'll call again." Then he fixed a second long look upon the pallid, working face before him, and whistling for Angel, left the shop.

Chirrup followed him with his eyes until he disappeared, and then struck the desk a violent blow with his clenched fist. "He knows it," he muttered; "in half an hour all Forty-winks will know it. What will they say at the Lamb to-night. No one will believe my story. Poison a dog with a mince-pie, and then leave it on the

counter—no, no! And then my hesitating, and going to the out-of-the-way shop to buy the arsenic; and my running out like a madman after nobody knows what! I 'm lost, lost, lost! Pity and look down on me! I 'm lost!"

At this moment a man entered the shop; Chirrup recognised the pale face of the druggist of the back street.

"Don't say I sold you the arsenic, and I 'll not denounce you for the murder," he said in a hoarse whisper.

The pastry-cook moved his lips, but no sound passed them.

"I 'm a man with a young family," pleaded the druggist, always in the same horrible whisper; "I love my wife! I do; I was in the wrong to sell you the poison; but, my children, my children! if I am transported they will die in the workhouse, I know they will. Confess, but spare me."

Chirrup could only wave his hand; and the *man* vanished from the shop, taking, however, a *couple of tarts* with him, and displaying them when

he reached the street, as though to satisfy everybody as to the cause of his visit to the pastry-cook's.

The self-condemned poisoner sat for two or three minutes speechless ; at length he found his voice.

" I shall be hanged, hanged, hanged, by the neck until I am dead ; and the Lord have mercy upon my soul," he groaned, unconsciously repeating part of the terrible phraseology of the extreme sentence of the law. Then he paused ; suddenly his eye brightened. " I shall not be hanged," he cried ; " no, no, there is the Slush," and he rose from his seat and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

At this moment the glass door opened, and Pattie looked timidly into the shop. The eyes of the uncle and niece met.

" Go away," he said ; " Go away, good girl ; go, do go ! "

" But uncle, uncle, I am frightened ; oh tell *me*, *has anything happened ?* "

"I can't tell her," muttered Chirrup; and then he murmured aloud, "No, no, child, nothing. Go into the parlour, and I'll come to you—or stay, I'm not well, I shall go out into the air for a little; when I go, come and mind the shop; I'll be back presently."

Pattie withdrew with anything but a satisfied countenance; and her uncle hastily seizing a piece of paper, scribbled in almost illegible characters the following note:—

"I confess the poisoning, but I did not mean it. I am the victim of circumstances. I'll be found in the Slush. Don't think too ill of me. I could not bear to die on the gallows. I leave my all to my niece Pattie; and I hope Government won't interfere

"JOHN CHIRRUP."

This incoherent epistle the almost paralysed man folded with trembling hands, and then, taking up the pen, he sought to address it. His mind *appeared for the moment* to have left him, for he

paused and squeezed his forehead with his left hand, as though he would recall the name he wished to trace; and then, as if unable to succeed, he uttered a despairing exclamation, wrote rapidly the words, "To Any One," flung the letter thus comprehensively addressed upon the counter, and calling, "Pattie, Pattie, mind the shop," tottered out and walked rapidly towards the spot where the bridge crosses the Slush, just above a deep black pool, bordered with rank water-weeds, and known as the "Drowned Man's Hole."





### CHAPTER III.



AFTER Snitch had left the pastry-cook's shop, he proceeded toward a secluded lane, a favourite haunt of his. He

wrought out and now overgrown with furze and brushwood. Mr. Snitch, walking softly as was his habit, observed, in the quarry-hole in question, a lean vagrant-looking boy, sitting on a big stone, and looking with eager eyes upon a plump mince-pie. Suddenly the juvenile started up, looked anxiously round, and appeared to listen intently. Snitch slid noiselessly behind a stunted bush, and watched. Apparently the boy's alarm was groundless, for he resumed his seat, gloated upon the pastry which he held in hand, and then raised it to his mouth.

Snitch, never remarkably amiable, happened at this particular moment to be even more ill-tempered than usual; for he was curious to know the cause of the disturbance he had just seen in the streets, and to lay himself under the obligation of restoring it. He therefore sneaked up behind the bush, as that young gentleman was in the act of taking a pair of pretty capacious jaws to the pie, the pie was rudely snatched out of his hand, and starting up and looking round,

the vagrant found himself face to face with Snitch.

"It would have been so nice, would'nt it?" drawled the owner of Angel, in his most provoking tones. He expected a burst of indignant outcry from the despoiled one, but the boy uttered not a sound. He cast a quick suspicious glance about, however, and so did Snitch; for hardened as he was, he would have been ashamed at having been caught in such a contemptible piece of petty tyranny. But nobody was in sight.

"Do you like mince-pies, my poor boy?" taunted Snitch. "Why don't you cry for it, eh?"

The person addressed, however, probably had his own reasons for making no noise about the outrage; for, after a moment's pause, he darted away at full speed, closely pursued by Angel, who always followed any retreating object with cannibalistic designs, leaving the astonished Snitch with the mince-pie in his hand.

"Hallo! hallo!" he shouted to his dog; "seize *him*, boy, seize *him*!"

Angel required little such encouragement. He was close at the boy's heels as the latter rounded a distant corner of the lane ; they both disappeared, therefore, nearly at the same moment ; but a loud cry, which was heard a minute after, followed by the re-appearance of Angel, licking his lips after his usual fashion on such occasions, sufficiently explained the issue of the chase to Mr. Snitch, who laughed to himself, put the pie into his pocket, and then slowly retraced his steps to No. 10 High Street.

In the meantime poor Pattie was left alone in the shop, bewildered and afraid. Curious faces passed and repassed upon the pavement, and peeped in at the door, and through the windows. The girl's heart beat until she herself heard it ; she had never before known other than mere childish griefs, but she had now an awful consciousness that something incredibly fearful had happened. Twice did she essay to gain the street to make inquiries, but her knees shook, and her heart got sick, so she sat down again.

Suddenly the door was darkened by the presence of Mrs. Groats, the baker's wife. Pattie mechanically as to attend upon a customer. Mr. Groats stood at the counter and eyed the girl w



a gaze of mingled curiosity and hearty pity. Mr. Groats had the faults and the virtues of woman kind. She had entered the shop to see Pattie *perhaps to pick up any little odd particul*

of what was wrong—perhaps to indulge in the luxury of witnessing and comforting another's woe ; but however that may have been, the pallid frightened face of the girl checked any outpouring either of vulgar curiosity or commonplace sympathy, and the baker's wife stood motionless before the confectioner's niece.

“ What can I serve you with ? ” said Pattie. Familiar as was the phrase, the low peculiar tone with which it was uttered, made Mrs. Groat start and tremble. She hurriedly named some trifling article of pastry ; but, immediately checking herself, said that it would do to-morrow, and hurried from the shop. The baker's wife had unconsciously paid a tribute to the majesty of woe.

Pattie stood and looked vacantly in the direction in which the would-be customer had disappeared. It was evident that something terrible was wrong. Her uncle—where was her uncle, her loved, her only relative ? she threw her hands aloft wildly, a choaking something rose in her throat, then a burst of tears came to her relief, and she laid her

head upon the counter and wept. Suddenly she started up—an idea had flashed across her. She was in the act of rushing to the desk when her eye caught the note lying upon the counter, and with a cry of eagerness she darted upon it, and snatching it up, read the desperate inscription, “To Any One.”

“To any one”—what despair was there in the words! No fondness, no love, no remembrance of her. It was evidently her uncle’s last words, and they were addressed “to any one.” She held the note in her hand, her eyes rivetted upon the superscription, her limbs motionless as paralysed. At that moment some one entered; she knew it was not her uncle’s step, and did not look up until she was startled by Snitch’s voice.

“Chirrup not come back yet?” he growled. Pattie mechanically held the note out to Snitch. She had forgotten her old enemy. In the extremity of her distress all men became equal.

Switch took it. “To Any One,” he said.

Pattie nodded, and looked at him with a lustreless eye.

"As you don't seem to have opened it," he said, "I suppose you count yourself no one; well, I 'm not so modest;" and he unfolded the paper, starting backwards as he read the first sentence.

Peevish, sulky, cross, and bilious as Snitch





was, there was something so awful and unexpected in the words he saw before him, that he could have wished the whole affair a dream. This feeling lasted but for a moment. His mind, once opened to the appalling depth of the calamity, began to take a morbid interest, then a horrible enjoyment in the catastrophe; and when, on a sign from Pattie, he read the note aloud, he accentuated every syllable—ramming them, so to speak, like bodkins into Pattie's shrinking soul.

When he had finished there was a pause. Pattie sat, like a marble statue, tearless and unmoved. There are some moments of deep distress which do the work of years on the human soul. There are instants of fearful feeling which develop powers, produce purity, purge away follies and vain affections, as flame cleanses metal. Pattie's mind was undergoing the terrible ordeal. Snitch absolutely grew frightened as he gazed on her; she was awfully beautiful in her pallor. Her hair *appeared* as if it rustled and rose upwards; her eyes *shone like balls of fire*, yet never moved or winked.

her nostrils only heaved and dilated ; her teeth were clenched—you could hear them grinding in the silence. The soul of the girl was passing into the soul of the woman.

At length Pattie started up, and flinging her arms over her head, cried with a terrible voice, “ I do not believe it ! ”

“ Here is his writing,” said Snitch, “ and signed John Chirrup ; I know the loop of the J. I ’m sorry for it ; I should not have thought it.”

There was another pause, which was broken by the noise of many voices and approaching footsteps. They came nearer and nearer, and then there appeared a disorderly crowd, who flocked round the shop-door, all shouting and asking hurried questions, and leaping on each others’ shoulders to gaze upon some one in the middle. In a moment the grand centre of the attraction appeared. Chirrup, his clothes streaming with water, his face blue and haggard, tottered into the shop, supported by two men.

“ Look arter your uncle, Miss,” said one of

them, addressing Pattie, roughly, but not disrespectfully. "We 're afeared that he 's taken bad here," and the speaker tapped his forehead.

"Me and my mate, Miss," said Chirrup's other supporter, "was a-hauling the siene in the Dead-man's Hole, when we see Mr. Chirrup a-coming along the bridge like a raging madman. Mate, sez I, do you see that ere, sez I, when afore the words were out of my mouth, danged if the gen'lm'n had n't jumped over the parapet into the river."

"Lucky thing, Miss, our punt was a-nigh," interrupted the first of Chirrup's preservers. "As it was, he tried hard to get to the bottom, but we teuk him out a'most in spite of himself."

"And brought him home ; and it's our advice, Miss, to send for a doctor, and not lose no time, which is precious." This was said by the fisherman No. 2, the gentlemen in fact appearing to relieve each other regularly in narrating the untoward tale.

All this time Chirrup sat motionless upon a *chair into which* he had sunk, and merely glanced

with a semi-vacant look from one speaker to the other.

Pattie hastily offered the men money and thanks, and whispered them for Heaven's sake to clear the shop. This they were not long in effecting, particularly as Angel joined his energies to theirs, until everybody was in the street but his coadjutors, when he attacked and drove them out too.

Snitch then shut the door; and, after a fearful pause, said to Chirrup—holding the note in his hand—

“Is it true?”

The greatest painter who ever handled a brush would have failed, had he attempted to pourtray the awful anxiety of Pattie's face as she leaned forward to hear the reply.

“I—I—did not mean to—though I did it,” was the not over-intelligible reply, gasped, rather than spoken, by Chirrup.

Pattie wrung her hands, and despair twitched all her features, leaving them if possible more pallid than before.

Snitch muttered something about his duty to society.

"Listen! I 'll explain—I 'll try to explain, stammered poor Chirrup.

"Explain! explain!" snarled Snitch; "explain poisoning and murdering. No, you will explain them to the judge and the jury."

"The—the—force of circumstances," groaned the pastry-cook; and then he stretched out his arms as though he would embrace his niece. An almost imperceptible gesture forbade him.

This was the crowning blow; the poor fellow sank again back in the chair, and said in an almost inaudible voice, "Go for the officers."

Snitch looked round; uncle and niece appeared like unbreathing statues, and without another word he left the shop. His return was almost immediate, and he was accompanied by Gabriel Clinch, the one town-officer, policeman, gaoler and turnkey of Forty-winks, who had instinctively smelt out something in his way, and *had met* Snitch almost on the threshold, and

learned in two words the nature of the supposed crime.

When Chirrup saw Clinch he rose mechanically, and Pattie squeezed her shut hands till the nails touched the quick. A mist came over her eyes. Nature was giving way. She heard a voice say, "Here 's a bad job ;" and she heard her uncle reply, " I am ready." Then came a shuffling of feet. The mist appeared to clear away before her, and she saw that the shop was empty. With a shriek which was heard over half Forty-winks, her senses left her, and she fell like a bundle of rags upon the floor.

Fortunately help was near. Worthy Mrs. Groats, with plenteous tears, and innumerable " Who 'd ha' thought it's," was putting the still insensible girl to bed, while Mr. Clinch was locking up her uncle, in a sort of half cell half lumber-room, behind the Town Hall.



#### CHAPTER IV.

**R**UMOUR'S proverbially multitudinous tongues never wagged faster or went further than they did in the village of Forty-winks the afternoon of Mr. Chirrup's arrest. That event might have taken place about two o'clock. By half past two it was

discovered that the pastry-cook had poisoned a man and his wife; by three that he had sent a man, his wife, and his children, out of the world. In another half hour two families had been murdered; and by dinner time it was popularly reported that everybody who had died in Forty-winks for the last six months owed their decease to the machinations of the awful criminal Chirrup. The excitement increased momentarily. At five o'clock it was announced on good grounds that the confectioner had entered into a contract with a wholesale London chemist for regular supplies of arsenic and prussic acid; and Doctor Druggum's assistant, who was an oracle at the Lamb, horrified all his hearers by long dissertations upon the poisoners of the middle ages, upon the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, and the qualities of briscine and aqua tofana. New proofs of the guilt of the unhappy Chirrup of course came to light every moment. It was wonderful how brimful people's memories became of suspicious circumstances. Smith stated that he did not know how it was, but that he had never liked that man.



Brown recollected that he had always felt a cold shudder whenever he came near him. Thomson said that he had always suspected that there was something wrong; and Johnson added that such had ever been his feelings, although he had never told anybody. Mr. Higgins, the parish clerk, thought the catastrophe an awful instance of human depravity; but he had all along suspected that nothing good would come of Chirrup's going to a dissenting chapel—a position which Mr. Wiggins, an eminent office-bearer in the Little Bethesda New Light Chapel, in Cross Lane, controverted with such zeal and vehemence, that the two champions of rival systems had nearly brought their dispute to the ancient ordeal of trial by combat, when the whole room were awed by the announcement, made on unknown but implicitly believed authority, that Chirrup had entered into an awful scheme for poisoning all Forty-winks, and that every bit of pastry which had issued that morning from his shop had been seasoned, some with quick, some *with slow, but all with deadly poison.*

There was a horrible pause in the public room of the Lamb at this announcement, and not long after it a young man, with light hair, cold grey stony eyes, and a face swollen and pimpled by that saddest of habits, youthful intemperance, quietly rose and glided out of the room. Nobody observed his departure, and in a few moments the broken conversation was renewed, but in a subdued and whispering tone.

Mention has been made in a former part of this history of a certain high blank wall, which shut out from vulgar view the garden of the Grange. The Grange was an ugly ancient red brick mansion, built possibly in the days of Queen Anne, with numerous small windows, a high steep tiled roof, a strong battalion of chimney pots, and a big hall door, sheltered by a species of clumsy canopy of rudely carved oak, and approached by a flight of broken and weed-grown steps, flanked by massive iron railings. Altogether, the place was very like those dreary architectural decorations which abound in samplers, placed above the letters of the alphabet.

and supported on either hand by an array of worsted figures. There was a patch of grass before the house, around which grew, out of the weedy and neglected ground, some fine old horse chestnuts, overshadowing a mass of tangled shrubbery and undergrowth.

The Grange was inhabited but by three persons, the proprietor, his son, and an old male servant. Neither the first nor the last of these ever crossed the threshold of the grounds. Glimpses might be sometimes caught of their grey heads at the windows, and occasionally, during a summer afternoon, two shabby-looking old men were visible, sunning themselves on a bench which was placed along a wall, or tottering backwards and forwards on the weedy gravel before the door. It would be difficult to tell from their dress, or from their manner to each other, which was the master and which the servant. They seemed to have outlived all such distinctions of rank, and, as the grave opened wider and wider before them, to be preparing to descend *into it as brothers* in a common manhood.



The third personage of this mysterious household was the young man I have just mentioned as having left the public room of the Lamb, upon the receipt of the horrifying intelligence of Chirrup's wholesale designs against the lives of the population of Forty-winks. This man, who was the son and heir of the proprietor of the Grange, was known by the appellation of Young Martin—his father

being sometimes termed "Old Martin," sometimes, in a still less complimentary fashion, "Old Miser Martin," and sometimes the "Squire." Young Martin bore in Forty-winks the very well-deserved character of a worthless and dissipated man, with hardly one good point about him.



Although the heir-apparent to the Grange with its appertaining lands, which formed a small but valuable estate, he was seldom or never to be seen beneath any respectable roof in Forty-winks, and even in the public room of the Lamb he was as much shunned and neglected as a man could be without receiving the positive cut-direct. His chief associate was a fellow who bore no enviable reputation, and who gained a living nominally as a dog-fancier and a horse-doctor ; but who added to these crafts certain accomplishments which he deemed it prudent to keep under the rose, whereof night-poaching with nets and dog-stealing were said not to be the most culpable. Young Martin was, however, tolerably popular amongst the tribe of hostlers and stable boys. He was always ready to toss a helper for a pint of ale, and passed much of his time in smoking in inn-yards and stables. He kept a horse of his own, too—a blood mare ; was a fearless rider ; and, after he had steadied his arm with a couple of small glasses of brown brandy, a dead shot. Add to these accomplishments great skill



in the breeding and crossing of terriers and b  
dogs, a competent knowledge of the odds, and so  
talent for making up a betting-book, and you h  
a notion of the character of Young Martin, the l  
of the Grange.

His accomplishments, however, were very mu  
*kept under by the rigid rule of his father's hou*

hold. The squire, if not an actual miser, was a hard, griping, eccentric old man. He allowed his son to keep a horse on the condition that he should be his own groom. This, Young Martin, who, as we know, had tastes smacking rather of the stable than the drawing-room, readily consented to, and days frequently passed over without the father and son meeting—the former passing nearly all his time in company with Crooks, his old servitor, with whom he also took his meals; the son enjoying the delightful society of his own set in Forty-winks, or in any of the beer houses in the neighbourhood.

As may be imagined, old Martin was reputed to be enormously wealthy. His rents were regularly paid, and as regularly deposited in the county bank, a branch of which had premises, an agent, and a couple of clerks in the High Street of Forty-winks. The son, of course, looked eagerly for the moment when Death, stalking into the gloomy old Grange, would strike the old man down, and leave him undisputed heir of the house, the estate, and *the accumulated treasures heaped up by its present*



possessor. He had already formed his plans for action after the happy event, and made no scruple of talking them over with the dog-fancier and other gentlemen of kindred tastes and sentiments ; the conversation, which was usually held over flowing mugs of ale, being generally terminated by a toast, expressive of the earnest hope and prayer of the company that the old Squire might make as speedy as possible an exit from this world of sin and suffering.

Such, then, was the younger Mr. Martin, such were his tastes, and such his position in his family circle. He had been listening with vulgar curiosity to the details of alleged crimes, brought by open-mouthed relators, each one improving upon his neighbour's version, into the excited parlour of the Lamb. He had been drinking ale, when suddenly he started slightly, his hands involuntarily clenched, his mouth opened, a glare of baleful light passed through his bleared, fishy eyes, and he remained sunk in thought. The company *talked noisily*, but he did not heed them, and

was in his turn unnoticed. All at once he pushed aside the half-finished mug of ale, and called for brandy.

“ Warm with, sir ? ” asked the waiter.

“ Neat,” said Martin ; “ a quartern.”

The liquor was brought, and he drank it slowly, glass after glass. It was then that, after a short pause, he left the room, and took his way to the Grange. Martin had been drinking freely before he called for the brandy ; but the strong spirit did not appear to have produced any additional effect upon his seasoned composition.

“ It makes me bold, though,” he murmured to himself ; “ bold and steady—bold and steady.”

It had been dark for about an hour, and the streets of Forty-winks were almost deserted. The shops, too, appeared to be left to themselves ; for owners and customers were alike discussing the events of the day by their fire-sides. Chirrup’s shop was dark and closed—a precaution taken by Mrs. Groats in consequence of a strong demonstration of a popular intention of breaking the windows.

Martin, therefore, reached the gate of the grounds before the Grange without having encountered a mortal. He took a key from his pocket, opened a little wicket by the side of the carriage entry, and walked hastily towards the house. Then, and not until then, as though he had been afraid even to think to himself in the public streets, did the confused and black imaginings of his mind take a settled form and purpose.

"I'll do it," he muttered. "If I wait a dozen of years my father may not die, and I can never expect the ghost of a chance like this again. Nobody can know, nobody can accuse. Chirrup has poisoned half the town; why should he not have poisoned the old man also? But, besides, it won't be me after all. I know they got some things from his shop to-day. I did not recommend them; I did not bring them; I did not make them eat 'em. They'll do it of their own free will, and I won't interfere, that's all. If a man falls into a river, and I don't pull him out, it's not murder. No *more is this*. By Jove, I'm in luck's way! and

be a fool if I did not avail myself of it. There 's  
as, to be sure. His death will do me no good ;  
o save him, would be to spoil all. No, no.  
hey are so fond of each other, let them go  
her."

Thus reasoning—thus attempting to shift from  
elf the moral as well as the legal guilt of the  
: which he had made up his mind to commit,  
g Martin reached the Hall door, and by means  
: latch-key immediately entered, drawing bolt  
astening chain behind him, as if possessed by  
stinctive fear of the deed being interrupted.  
ld Martin dined late, and avaricious and saving  
was, liked to dine comfortably. Consequently,  
andiworks of Chirrup were no strangers to his

Indeed, that very morning poor Pattie had  
yed a certain tart to the Grange, which had  
received at the outer gate by Crooks, and had  
een unnoticed by the son and heir as he went  
upon his usual pursuits.

With the step of a thief and a murderer, Young  
n ascended the ample staircase which led to

the dining-room. He felt that he was pale, and that his hair was bristling upwards; but the spirit which he had drunk in part sustained him; and although a cold sweat started out upon his brow, he experienced little trepidation and no remorse. He knew that he should feel both the next day; but he argued that that should not stop his present resolve—a resolve which, once reduced to action, would open to him in a moment the career for which he had so long been sighing.

Half-way up the stairs he threw off his boot and then groped his way silently onwards. The door of the apartment which his father and the old servant generally used as an eating and sitting room was ajar, and he heard their voices in careless conversation, mingled with the usual dinner clatter of knives and forks. A moment more, and he was kneeling on the landing-place, peeping through the chink between the lintel and the half-opened door. His breath came thick and fast, and he had steadied himself by placing one hand upon the floor as he gazed upon his intended victims.



They sat in a large, lofty, wainscotted old room, its scanty, antique, and uncomfortable looking furniture dimly discernible by the fitful blinks of a small fire, and the smoky light of a single candle, which wavered and eddied in the draughts. A small round table was drawn up close to the grate. The master sat in a well-worn arm-chair, the serving man upon a stool, which evidently appertained to a battered old spinet which stood in a corner. The difference in point of seat was not the only one which served to mark the relative positions of the patron and dependant. Before Old Martin was

placed a silver goblet of ale ; before Crooks stood a pewter mug, foaming with the same nut-brown draught.

But it was rather what they ate, than what they drank, that interested Young Martin. In fact, the substantials of the dinner appeared to have been just removed by Crooks, who set upon the table a dish which he had fetched from the sideboard. The heir recognised the tart which Pattie had brought to the Grange ; and as he glared upon it he grasped the region of the heart, as though to prevent its beatings from revealing the awful secret.

Meanwhile the old man divided the fatal pastry.

“ Chirrup is a great man for paste,” he observed, as he loaded his plate with a liberal portion, and passed the dish to his favoured servant.

“ It is very good, sir, very good,” said Crooks ; “ too good for me. I only wish my young master was here to share it.”

“ Your young master !” repeated the squir  
*and there was a concentrated bitterness in his tone*

“A profligate, Crooks ; a low-minded, low-living, low-loving vagabond. He will never be your master !”

Young Martin's hands clenched, and his teeth closed.

“Do you think,” resumed his father, “that he shall have the Grange lands, Crooks, to feast and to fatten on with poachers and dog-fanciers? No. Thank God ! my father broke the entail, and his grandson shall feel the sweets of the process. My mind is made up. The Grange shall go to the County Hospital. Better to aid the stricken poor, than to feed the heartless profligate.”

“But, sir—but, my master—” Crooks ventured to intercede

“Be silent,” said the Squire. “He has carved out his own fate.”

There was a moment's pause.

“Eat, man, eat !” said Old Martin, imperiously ; and with clenched teeth and glaring eyes his son beheld master and man partake of the first morsel of the fatal pastry. For an instant a good impulse



flashed upon his soul. His tongue stirred to utter a warning cry, and his muscles moved as though they would involuntarily bear him on to interrupt the deadly repast. It was but for a moment. He repulsed the good angel as though it had been an evil spirit. The words of the old man ringing in his ears drowned the soul-heard whisper, which thrilled for a moment through his being. "Disinherit me!" he murmured. "Aha! is it come to that? Then, eat, eat, eat!" Then a horrid sort of fascination seemed to seize him. He was not conscious of breathing, he was rooted as by a waking nightmare to the spot; and with his eyes glued to the small aperture through which he gazed, he watched the consumption of the fatal viand. Both master and man, old as they were, eat heartily; and it was not until a tolerably large portion of the pastry had disappeared that Young Martin felt the awful guilt of the murderer settle upon his soul. It came on, so to speak, slowly. It was not as though a blow had been struck—one final and fatal blow had been inflicted. The damning conscious-

ness of his sin rose up gradually in his mind; a cold hand appeared slowly but surely to gather round his heart; he became faint and sick; his sight failed him; and it was by a tremendous effort that he rose from his stooping posture and staggered down the stairs.

In the hall he stopped to listen. He heard the old man cough, and the echoes of the long still house, multiplied and repeated the sound.

"The death rattle," he muttered; and with a trembling hand he undid the fastenings of the door, and fled out into the open night. Once clear of the outer gate, he walked quickly towards the High Street. As he went he passed a feeble wavering lamp which showed him his shadow blackening the uneven way. He stopped and looked at it. "I am a parricide," he muttered, "but my shadow is unchanged; why then should my face be altered?" and then he proceeded rapidly along. Before clearing the dark lane in which the Grange was situated, a long low howl struck his ear. He involuntarily paused and shook with fear, so dread

and wailing was the sound. "It 's only that damned dog of Snitch's," he murmured, and quickly passed on.

The Lamb was the first place he entered. He thought it as well to prevent the slightest breath of suspicion, and therefore walked into the public room, which he had quitted not much more than an hour before.

"Ah, Martin, back again; well, any more news?" said Mr. Groats, the baker.

The man addressed made a mighty effort, and answered calmly—

"I did n't hear any: I have not been home; only up at Bob Hurry's." This was his dog-fancying friend.

"Well, as I was saying," resumed a voice from near the fire-place, which Young Martin knew to belong to the fussy doctor's assistant; "Well, from what we hear, prussic acid is the drug which has been used by that unhappy man, Chirrup. Now, the effects of prussic acid are well known *It is a quick as well as a deadly poison*: and th

first sign of its taking effect is sometimes an involuntary scream ; sometimes a hollow cough-like noise appearing to proceed from the involuntary but simultaneous action of the lungs and the muscles of the thorax."

"I have heard it," were the words, or at all events the thought, which rose up in Martin's mind, and without saying a syllable he slunk out, and proceeded to another tavern in which he was well known, and where he would be little likely to hear a dissertation upon the properties of either briscine, prussic acid, or aqua tofana.

A group of his stable friends were seated at the board, and they welcomed him with noisy acclamations. The wretched man called for spirits, drank deeply, talked loudly, laughed boisterously, and was all the while guessing in his inmost soul in what parts of the room the bodies of his father and old Crooks were lying.

The more he drank to drive the fancy away, the more it settled upon him, until at length he



found himself conjuring up the semblance of the bodies in the room in which he sat.

“Could I but speak of them,” he inwardly soliloquised ; “ could I but keep talking ; could I but pretend to cry over them, all would be well ; *but 't is I—myself must give the alarm.*”

He called for spirits ; drank glass after glass to screw his courage to the sticking point ; and then, managing to take leave of the rabble by whom he was surrounded, walked, in a half-resolute, half-stupified state of mind, to the Grange.

He paused before the gate to summon up his scattered faculties, but he was too much agitated effectually to use the key of the wicket which he possessed ; although, after mechanically ringing the bell, he continued to attempt to open the gate himself.

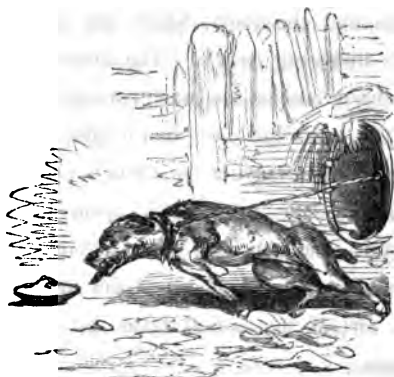
The click produced by the sudden unshooting of the hasp from within, made him start backwards, and at the same moment the door opened the sudden flash of a lamp flickered through the gloom, and Young Martin saw two dark shadowy forms and two pale faces—the faces of his father and his father's servitor, whom he believed that he had left in the agonies of death.

With an inarticulate yell he staggered back and fell upon the road.

“He is drunk,” said Old Martin, “Let him lie ”

The door was closed, the bolt was shot, the light vanished, and the drear wind of December howled amongst the leafless trees and over the insensible body of the murderer in mind, who lay motionless upon the stones.





## CHAPTER V.

**M**EANTIME night crept slowly on, and the two good-hearted gossips, Mrs. Groats and Mrs. Tanks, still sat by the bed-side of poor Pattie. The girl had been, in their own phrase, "out of one fit into another" for hours, but these nervous struggles had gradually subsided, and the pastry-cook's niece had at length sunk into a sort of stupor, half doze, half faint.



The women talked in whispers, looking fearfully around the room, which was lighted only by one flickering candle. The heart-broken girl lay almost motionless and partially undressed upon the bed; her face damp and pallid; her lips sometimes moving, as though she muttered to herself; her eyes partly open, but glazed and dull; and her little foot, agitated probably by some nervous twitching of the muscles, beating a sort of mechanical tattoo on one of the bed-posts.

From time to time the attendant women would look earnestly at her, and ask her how she felt, and try to raise her head to a more easy position upon the pillow. Once a faint smile of thanks seemed to pass across her face, and opening her eyes she fixed them gratefully upon her kind nurses. Then in a moment a shuddering consciousness of what had happened appeared to flash across her. She quickly hid her face with her hands, and her whole frame became agitated by a renewal of the hysteric attacks.

At length, as I have said, they abated, and the girl lay in a sort of life-in-death state.

"They 'll hang him," whispered Mrs. Groats to her colleague in the watch; "they 'll hang him, depend upon it."

"It seems a dream," responded the lady addressed. "Such a peticklar kind man too he always looked. 'T was no later nor Tuesday that he patted our Johnny upon the head, gave him a lollipop, and told him to be a good boy."

"Then you may be a thankful woman," said Mrs. Groats solemnly; "you may be a thankful woman, Mrs. Tanks, that Johnny is not lying screwed down this very minute."

"Lor' a' mercy," said the grocer's wife, instinctively rising as if to hurry home in case Johnny should have been taken with some desperate symptom since she had left him at tea time, and then resuming her seat as she recalled to mind his flourishing condition all day; "Lor' a' mercy, Mrs. Groats, how you do frighten a body to be sure."

The baker's wife was as good-natured a person as need be. She was utterly shocked at Chirrup's supposed crime, and sincerely felt for his unprotected niece; but, like many other folks, she took a morbid pleasure in prating about other people's misfortunes, and making all manner of dismal gratuitous suppositions about them.

"He 'll be hanged," she repeated, "next 'sizes."

"If it was anything but murder," whispered Mrs. Tanks. "Really I can hardly bring myself to believe it yet. Now, if it was Snitch, for instance, I should not have wondered."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Groats, solemnly; "it 's your quiet sleek men that are sometimes the most dangerous. There 's no trusting any of them."

"But that poor child there," whispered Mrs. Tanks, looking at Pattie; "God help her, what is to become of her—without a penny, and almost without a friend. Who will marry a girl whose *uncle has been hanged?*"

"She must leave the country," said Mrs. Groats decidedly.

"She need not leave it, so long as she wishes to stay, and so long as we have a roof over our heads," said the kind-hearted partner of the grocer of Forty-winks.

"I don't know," whispered Mrs. Groats. "We all know what a spirit Pattie had. I don't think she 'd take assistance from any one here; and if she would, it is my opinion that she will not need it long. Did you ever see such a change in any mortal, as a few hours have made in her?"

The woman was right. The rosy-cheeked, happy-looking damsel of the morning, lay upon her little bed, as pale, as broken, and seemingly as helpless, as if a long and withering sickness had kept her there for weeks.

The two women gazed in silence on the white face, and the twitching limbs. No sound, except the low sobs with which the invalid drew her breath, was stirring in the chamber. Without, the night-wind came sighing in fitful moans,

every now and then rustling, with a low rattle, the leafless branches of the trees.

All at once, a loud unearthly howl broke the monotony of these dreary sounds.

"What's that?" said both the attendants, in a breath.

"It came from behind the house," whispered Mrs. Groats. "God be about us! it was a fearsome yell."

"Nonsense!" said her companion, obviously reassured by an idea which struck her; "it is just that nasty brute of a dog, that Snitch keeps—I do declare—I think on purpose to annoy the neighbourhood."

And so Mrs. Groats and Mrs. Tanks drew aside the window-blind, and looked out. The back door, leading from Snitch's kitchen to the garden, was open, and a red gleam of light fell through it upon the trampled muddy ground, showing Angel's kennel, and Angel himself, securely chained to his wooden dwelling; but *leaping, straining, and struggling* in his bonds, as if

to get at something tantalisingly placed just beyond the scope of his chain. In another moment the women could distinguish in the gloom the figure of Snitch himself, evidently tempting the dog with some dainty, which he allowed him to sniff, but not to bite. What the cate was, the observers could not well make out ; but it appeared to be something round, or oval—very much the shape, in fact, of a mince-pie. At length, Snitch, with a dry, rattling laugh, placed the morsel on the ground, just beyond the dog's reach, and then retreated in-doors.

“ Now, did you ever see the likes of that ? ” demanded Mrs. Groats. “ The brute is bad enough, but the man is worse.”

“ I suppose,” replied her companion, “ that he 's tempting the animal, just to make it howl ; it has been uncommonly quiet till now.”

Whether such had or had not been Mr. Snitch's intention, it is impossible now to say ; but at all events, the effect of his proceedings was, to cause Angel, in his wrath, to favour the neigh-

bourhood with a voluble series of howls, screamed in his very loudest and very highest key.

“Ugh! the brute,” said Mrs. Groats, returning to the fire-side; “if Chirrup had only poisoned him instead of a human——Eh!—eh!—eh!—what’s that?”

The latter exclamation was occasioned by a



movement of Pattie's. As if struck by an electric shock, the girl started up in her bed, and then bounded on the floor. The two women fairly fled to different corners of the room, so sudden and unexpected was the manœuvre, leaving Pattie, her long hair waving round her pale face, in the centre of the apartment.

“Who is dead? who is it that my uncle has poisoned?” she screamed rather than said.

Now, it is possible that many of my readers may ask how it happened that this question was not put before. I reply to their demand, in Scotch fashion, by putting another. Do they know the nature of a panic? How often do we hear of a blind, instinctive, impulsive, epidemic terror, taking sudden hold of a squadron of warriors, and setting them all to the right about, at double quick time, perhaps without a man of them having any definite notion of where he is running to, or what he is running from. The impulse of imitation is strong in men—as in sheep. Let one *passenger* stare up at the firmament in *Cheapside*,



and half the street will join him, without a single lady or gentleman of them all being the least aware what the interesting object may be at which he or she is gazing.

Forty-winks was seized by some such panic—some such imitative impulse. Chirrup believed himself a poisoner. He confessed it. Others believed it too. Why should they not? The vaguest and wildest rumours flew about. Now, one man was said to be the victim—now, another; now, two men—now, four. It was nobody's business to trace out the truth. The judicial examination would take place next day. Every one knew that the actual facts would then be ascertained, and every one was fain to wait until they were.

Every one, except Pattie. Mrs. Groats and Mrs. Tanks gazed at her in bewilderment, and replied not. She repeated the question—

“Who is dead? who is it that my uncle has poisoned?”

At length, Mrs. Groats collected her scattered *wits to reply.*

"She's wandering," thought that good lady; and then said in a coaxing voice,

"Come dear, come—you will go to bed again—won't you?—there's a love."

"Who is dead? tell me—tell me. His name—his name," shrieked Pattie.

"No—now—my poor dear," whimpered Mrs. Tanks, making a step in advance, with outstretched arms; "no—no—come, you must not think of it—try to get some rest—do try."

"Who is dead?" screamed the girl; "I will know—who?"

The matrons looked at each other, and Pattie looked at them. There was a moment's silence within the chamber, broken but by Angel's howling without. Then Pattie began deliberately, but with slightly trembling fingers, to dress herself.

"What—what are you doing?" ejaculated the baker's wife.

"Where—where are you going?" stammered the grocer's wife.

"To the mayor's," said Pattie calmly.

"To the mayor's?" screamed the women together.

Pattie tied her bonnet on her head — the matrons made as though they would oppose her exit.

"Do not stop me, if you please," said the girl. They were simple words these, but both Mrs. Tanks and Mrs. Groats declared long afterwards that they would never forget them. Perhaps it was the way in which they were said that made them memorable. At all events, the gossips shrunk silently aside, and Pattie passed between them. "You may come after me if you like," she said, and then issued into the street, and without another word her friends followed her.

Mrs. Groats, however, lingered for a moment; as she passed through the shop her eye fell upon one of these long wooden spade-like utensils which are used by bakers and pastry-cooks for depositing in and withdrawing bread, pies, and so forth from their *ovens*. A malicious idea sparkled in her eye. She *took it up, went straight to the back yard, bent*

over the paling which separated Chirrup's ground from Snitch's, and pushed the substance which Angel was howling to get at within his reach. The dog fastened on it with a growl, and began to devour it greedily.

"Drat that Snitch," said Mrs. Groats, "and his dog too; I wish it was poisoned with all my heart." And then she rejoined her friend with all convenient speed.

## CHAPTER VI.



R. John Fuzz,  
the mayor of  
Snuggleton,  
lived hard  
by in a big  
house in the  
High Street.  
He was just  
sitting down  
with his  
lady mayor-  
ess and  
his friends  
Alderman  
Bumptions

and Alderman Gumble, who had dropped in to  
*make arrangements for the official examination*  
*next day, to a very comfortable hot supper, when*

scuffling of feet was heard upon the stairs, mingled with shrill objurgations from female voices—then the door was flung violently open, and Pattie stood before them. The party shrank back aghast.

“Mr. Fuzz,” said Pattie, “my uncle is in prison for murder—whom has he murdered?”

The men in office looked at each other and made no reply. At length the mayor spoke: “My girl,”



said he, "you must be aware that this is not the time for judicial business. To-morrow at ten o'clock——"

"Whom, whom has he murdered?" was the firm reply.

"I repeat," said the mayor, "that to-morrow——"

"To-morrow will not do. This night — this hour—this minute—I must know. I am my uncle's only friend—he is mine. You are the mayor of this town—you have him in custody; deny me—put me off—at your peril; here I stand—here I will stand—until I know whose life my uncle has taken."

"Why—child—child," interposed Mrs. Fuzz.

"I was a child this morning, I am a woman now," said Pattie. "Whom has my uncle murdered?"

The party looked at each other. "Commit her," said Bumptious, who was a man of few words—at all events few good ones.

"I really know not what to say," stammered *Gumble*. Poor gentleman, it was a common case *with him*.

"If you can't tell what crime has been committed," said Pattie, "how do you know that a crime has been committed at all? Tell me who has been poisoned, or let my uncle go."

"Really," said the mayor, "this is very embarrassing." And the scene was getting more embarrassing still, for the news of Pattie's proceeding, disseminated in the first instance by Mesdames Groats and Tanks, had gone like wildfire through Forty-winks, and very speedily drew a goodly crowd of the inhabitants towards the mayoral mansion. The foremost of these, finding the door hospitably open—for the girl who had answered Pattie's summons had engaged in single combat with her all the way up stairs, and then, being utterly routed and discomfited by the visitor's determination to see her master, had wisely lingered by the parlour door, to hear and see as much as possible—the first comers, I repeat, regarding the open door as a tacit invitation to enter, had availed themselves of it, and before Mr. Mayor had determined how to act, the room was fairly invaded by curious Forty-



winkians, a vast reserve of whom thronged the staircase.

"Really," repeated Mr. Fuzz, "this is embarrassing to the last degree."

"Who is it that has been poisoned?" re-demanded Pattie.

And the crowd took up the question, and echoed "Who, aye, who?"

Then there was a pause.

"It only flashed on me," said Pattie, "a little ago, that no one had told me who the victim was. I asked—nobody could tell me then; I ask again—nobody can tell me now. May it not be a mistake from beginning to end?"

"A mistake! pooh, pooh, impossible; did not the man himself confess it?" said Bumptious.

"Confess what?" echoed Pattie.

"Poisoning," said the mayor.

"Who?" re-demanded the girl.

There was another pause. It was broken by a *voice in the crowd*.

*"If nobody knows who it is as has been pisened,*

why don't you go and ask Chirrup hisself who he has pisened ?"

This sensible suggestion was acted upon ; and in a moment the whole party were on their march towards the Town Hall, lamps and torches having been forthcoming with a rapidity truly marvellous. Certainly the proceeding was somewhat irregular ; but then, as great events call forth great men, so do unprecedented events give birth to others as unprecedented as themselves.

On their way to the Town Hall, the procession swelled fast in numbers. Pattie particularly observed two men who joined it—the one was Snitch, who had been probably called forth by the unwonted uproar in the street ; the other was Young Martin. Snitch preserved his usual look of grim taciturnity ; Young Martin was ghastly pale, staggered in his gait, and seemed bent upon working himself into the centre of the crowd.

In a few minutes they were in the Town Hall. It was a damp, cold-looking, paltry room, with a long table and benches ranged down the centre.

At the upper end was a small dais, whereon was placed a desk, and three Windsor arm-chairs, in which the mayor and the aldermen without more ado ensconced themselves. The mayoress, who was a kind little body, encircled Pattie's waist with her arm, as she stood beside her husband.

"Bring out the prisoner, Clinch," said the mayor, looking about him at the extraordinary court he was presiding over. And in truth the scene was a strange one. The crowd of anxious faces which swarmed before him, fitfully shown by flaring torches, the light of which danced and flickered on the damp walls—the utter absence of anything like judicial formality, consequent upon the strangeness of the proceedings—and the interest, the intense interest manifested in every gesture and in every face—all this made up a very unusual and very striking spectacle.

"Silence! silence!" A stir at the lower end of the hall: Clinch was bringing in his prisoner. *A dozen torches were flashed, so as to fling their light upon the criminal. His little round face*

was pale and ghastly, and Clinch and a subordinate were obliged to support him. He clasped his



hands once or twice, but his eyes never left the floor. Oh! how great was the revolution a few hours had wrought in the jolly, jovial Chirrup.

"John Chirrup, listen to me," said the mayor. The pastry-cook faintly nodded.

"Certain circumstances in your case have, at the instance of your niece, induced me to accede to this singularly irregular proceeding."

"Scandalous! scandalous!" muttered Bump-tious.

"I don't know what to think of it," said Gumble.

"Now listen!" resumed Mr. Fuzz. "You have confessed to poisoning; who did you poison?"

The head of a pin alone might have been heard to tinkle on the floor, in the silence which ensued.

“Who did you poison?”

Chirrup's voice was at length heard—“A boy.”

There was a general groan. Pattie stood like a marble statue.

The mayor glanced at the aldermen.

“I thought so,” said Bumptious.

“I don't know what to think,” responded Gumble.

“Who was he?” asked the mayor.

“I don't know,” stammered the pastry-cook.

“By heavens!” shouted Fuzz, “this is the most wonderful case of poisoning I ever heard of. Nobody in the town seems killed, and the poisoner don't know his own victim.”

“He was a stranger,” gasped Chirrup.

“Ah!” said the mayor.

A low murmur went through the crowd.

“*How did he get the poison?*”

“*In a mince-pie.*”

Another murmur, louder than the first.

"Then, you confess it?"

"I confess having been the means of putting a fellow-creature to death, but I deny having purposely poisoned him."

A third murmur, but different in tone from the others.

"You gave him the pie?"

"No—he stole it."

"Ha!" exclaimed Snitch; "what like was he—eh?"

"A vagrant-looking boy," said Chirrup.

"My dog! my dog!" exclaimed Snitch.

"I know it—I know it all," screamed a woman's voice in the crowd. "Let him off—he's innocent—he's innocent—I knew it—I said it—wait—wait."

And a female suddenly tore her way out of the hall.

"Who is that?" demanded the lord mayor.

"I rather think, my lord," said Mr. Groats, "*that it's my missus, my lord.*"

"Most extraordinary business this," exclaimed Bumptious.

"I don't know what to think," said Gumble.

"We must proceed with the examination," resumed the mayor with dignity.

"Certainly," said Bumptious.

"I think as you think," said Gumble.

"Well, Chirrup, attend," proceeded Mr. Fuzz, in a loud voice; "describe the victim of your villany."

"He has four legs, and no tail at all to speak of," screamed a voice in the stairs; "and it was me that did it!"

"Who is that—what is that?" roared the mayor.

"My lord, I think it is my missus," said the bewildered Mr. Groats.

*There was a great stir at the lower end of the hall, and many voices cried aloud,*





“Here he is—here’s the boy.”

“Boy in your teeth!” shouted the honest Mrs. Groats; “here’s the only thing that has been killed to-day in Forty-winks,” and she swung upon the table the body of the defunct “Angel.”

“My dog—my dog!” groaned Snitch, falling with his head upon the table; “did I take the accursed pie from the blackguard who stole it, that you should be the victim!”





“You did, you did?” screamed Chirrup. “Then, hurrah! hurrah! I’m innocent. Nobody’s been killed! Hurrah!”

“Hurrah,” shouted the crowd, “hurrah!”

Pattie raised her arms and eyes to heaven. “Uncle,” she shrieked—“uncle!”

The people instinctively opened a lane between them, and in a moment they were in each other’s arms.

“*Hurrah!*” shouted the crowd again.

"Order, order," cried the mayor. "The examination is not over yet."

Chirrup looked up.

"You put poison in a mince-pie?" said Fuzz.

"I did."

"For whom did you intend it?"

"For the beast that has got it."

"Then the vagrant boy stole it; Snitch took it from him; and the dog got it after all."

"That's it, that's it," screamed Mrs. Groat. "Chirrup made the poisoned pie; the boy stole it from him; Snitch robbed the boy, then tempted the dog with it, and I shoved it within the brute's reach."

"Set Chirrup free," said the mayor. "Snitch, you have committed a robbery, but have prevented homicide. Go home. The dog ought to have been killed before. I congratulate the community on it's being dead now. Chirrup, shake hands. You may be proud of your niece. Gentlemen, we will give three cheers for Chirrup and his niece."

And they were given, and that lustily.

"The court is over," said the mayor.

That night there were happy hearts in Forty-winks ; but there were three happier than all the rest. Two I need not mention—Pattie's and Chirrup's.

The third was Young Martin's.

The "poison night," as it was long called in the little town, changed his character, and purged his soul.

In the silence of his chamber he knelt and prayed.

"I was a murderer in thought and will ; Chirrup but deemed he was an accidental poisoner. May I live an altered man to thank God for His great mercy."

And he did live, an altered man, a good man, and a meek and humbled man. The old gentleman altered his will in his son's favour ; and the father was still alive when Martin, then the loved and honoured heir to the Grange, took Pattie to wife, and Chirrup danced merrily at the wedding.





